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AUTHOR Markwart, Richard I.
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ABSTRACT

Political campaigns are major, high-budget marketing efforts, but because they are usually managed by people with little training in either marketing or communications, they fail to persuade voters to vote in the desired way. Political targeting can be treated as a segmentation problem, one of identifying and responding to the specific qualities of the target group. Applying buyer behavior segmentation strategy to a political campaign yields four categories: (1) the nonparticipant, (2) the hard loyalist, (3) the soft loyalist, and (4) the switcher. Removing the hard loyalists and nonparticipants from consideration leaves a diverse target group that comprises only 25% of the total population. Good segmentation requires that the segment be measurable, accessible, and substantial enough to make the effort worthwhile. Traditional breakdowns of segments are geographic, demographic, psychographic, and buyer behavior. Current methods of political targeting are all inadequate: pressure response and surveys of expert opinion, because they often talk to people already sold; basic application of demographics, because it rarely considers soft loyalists and switchers; and statistical approaches, because when based on demographics they too often depend upon a single demographic factor, and when based upon a geobehavioral approach, they rely on highly unusual conditions for their data. (JL)

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Targeting Political Communications: A Problem in Market Segmentation

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Richard I. Markwart, President, Richard Markwart Associates
2643-A S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois

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Efforts at targeting political communications by campaign organizations range from response to outside pressure through utilization of sophisticated computer models. Unfortunately, even the sophisticated efforts have met with varying degrees of success. One of the underlying reasons for lack of success is the poor appreciation of targeting by the communication and/or political professionals working in the political arena.

This paper examines the need for targeting; forms a marketing framework for the targeting process and discusses the various targeting approaches currently used.

The Need for Targeting:

Political campaigns are major marketing efforts aimed at gaining market share for a given candidate. They are major undertakings. For example, each Republican candidate for the office of Lieutenant Governor in the 1982 primary reported campaign budgets in excess of $250,000. The time concentration of the campaigns hide the true level of spending. Annualized, each campaign was spending a budget in excess of one million dollars.

Further, such budgets are managed by people with little training in either marketing or communications. The key copy, media, vehicle and scheduling decisions are made in haste

with little attention paid to the critical question of allocation of scarce resources. Thus, resources are allocated to communicating to voters would vote the desired way even in the absence of any communication and to communicating to voters would not vote the desired way even with a massive communication effort. DeVries and others have clearly identified the "ticket splitter" as the controlling force in most elections.

Targeting as a Market Segmentation Problem:

The marketing community has long recognized the need for and power in market segmentation as a basic tool for the development of marketing plans. Political targeting can be analyzed as a segmentation problem.

The benefits of segmenting a market include the ability to...

1. identify and compare the various potential buyer groups for opportunities to increase penetration
2. allocate a total marketing budget in a logical manner across the range of opportunities
3. adjust the content or timing of appeals to the various buyer groups
4. logically develop a media and vehicle plan

Segmenting the voter population using a traditional

buyer behavior segmentation strategy yields the following groupings.

1. The non-participant -- the people who rarely vote
2. The hard loyalists -- the voters whose only concern is the party of the candidate
3. The soft loyalists -- voters whose primary concern is the party of the candidate but who will crossover to vote for a candidate of the opposite party under some circumstances
4. The switchers -- voters who care little about the parties and vote only for specific candidates and often vote only in given elections

These groupings closely follow the typical segments found in analyzing brand choice behavior of consumers. Indeed, the party represents the brands. Various studies and our own experience has shown that 20-30% of the voters behave as Republican hard loyalists and 30-40% behave as Democratic brand loyalists. Shama demonstrated that party is one of four key factors voters use in forming images of candidates in partisian elections.

From a communications viewpoint we are only interested in those voters who are potential consumers of our product -- the voter groups who will cast a vote for our candidate given the proper communication effort. We are not interested in

in communicating to those who are already voting for our candidate -- our own hard loyalists. Nor do we wish to communicate those who will never vote for us -- the opposition's hard loyalists. In fact, Yalch has found that pre-election contact increases voter turnout. Thus communicating to the opposition hard loyalist voters may stimulate more of them to go to the polls to vote against us.

Given that nearly 50% of the population falls into the non-participant group (Hadley) and over 50% of the remaining population are hard loyalists (DeVries), we are faced with the challange of identifying and communicating a widely disperse group of people that comprises only 25% of the population.

Before examining the various techniques currently in use for targeting, we should consider some of the requirements of good segmentation in traditional marketing. Kotler suggests three conditions for effective segmentation. 1) The first condition is that the segment in question must be measurable. The data to perform the segmentation must be available. 2) The segment must be accessible to the marketer. That is some vehicle must exist that will allow us to communicate with the members of a segment at an affordable price. 3) The segment must be substantial enough to make the effort worthwhile.

Kotler also illustrates the typical breakdowns used by marketers to form segments:

1. Geographic
2. Demographic
3. Psychographic
4. Buyer Behavior

Current Methods of Political Targeting:

1. Pressure Response

In this case no targeting has been done or it has been done and quickly forgotten -- often the case when the targeting is performed by outside consultants and dumped upon the campaign manager.

The campaign performs the allocation by responding to pressure brought by outside forces. The pressure is usually a request or demand for additional resources made by people or organizations allied to the campaign. The requests are for a) additional allocation of campaign materials; b) additional allocation of candidate time for appearances within the requesting organization's territory; c) campaign participation in various cooperative advertising ventures.

These requests are honored or denied using decision rules that place high weight on the relative political status

or power of the requestor. Since a high status/power requestor normally represents a large block of hard loyalists, the campaign continually allocates additional resources to those voter segments that are already brand loyal to the candidate. Consequently, resources are denied to those segments that contain the soft loyalists or switchers. As the noted political consultant Dr. Douglas Bailey once remarked, "The problem with Republicans is that they spend all of their time talking to other Republicans."

Surveys of Expert Opinion:

The campaign planner or manager surveys the leaders of the various party organizations comprising the electorate and requests each leader to provide their estimates as to the areas which should receive campaign attention. The opinions are weighted on the basis of the relative status or power of the respondents and combined to form a ranking.

Unfortunately, the respondents susally simply supply a list of "good areas." These good areas tend to be those areas that produce the highest vote percentages for the candidate's own party and thus consist of high proportions of hard loyalists. The campaign once again over allocates its resources to those voters already sold.

Of course political marketers are not alone in this kind of resource dis-allocation. The above two situations frequently arise in any marketing situation that involves a multi-level marketing channel. Channel members constantly vie for the attention and resources of whatever member may be in control of the channel. Channel conflict is the result.

Basic Application of Demographics:

Often applied simultanously with other methods, this approach leads to the creation and distribution of special appeals to various target demographic groups. For examole, special print material and radio spots are developed to appeal to Blacks. The literature is distributed in geographic areas know to contain large numbers of Blacks and the ads run on stations with format appealing to large Black audiences.

Politicians have used almost every possible demographic variable possible including the following...

1) Age -- an appeal to the "senior citizen"
2) Sex -- my election will help women
3) Income -- I will support programs for the poor/ I will support tax cuts for you (the rich)/ I am the candidate of the "middle class"
4) Occupation -- My election is good for the farmer/the

small businessman/the unemployed/the blue collar worker

5) Religion -- How we will aid the private (ie religous) schools/A noted Rabbi-Minister speaks out on behalf of __(insert name here)__

6) Race -- We will work for Blacks/Whites/Others

7) Ethnicity -- A "balanced" ticket/non-English ads

The ultimate application of this approach occurs when a given demographic group is considered important enough to have its own campaign organization within the larger campaign. Thus we see the formation of special committees such as "Jews for Jones" or the "Poor Peoples' Coalition on Behalf of Smith." More often than not these organizations are the product of the parent campaign and not the spontaneous response of the Jewish population or poor people.

Unfortunately, this method of segmentation rarely considers the relative proportion of potential soft loyalists or switchers within the demographic groupings and thus fails to properly allocate its resources. This method can also expose the campaign to some embarassment. During 1979 municipal elections in Chicago, the entire Republican ticket was seated before a gathering of one of the leading ethinic pressure groups in the city while the leader of that group was outside holding a news conference to endorse the Democratic ticket. The Republicans were there at the demand

of the leader of the group. The implication was that if they weren't there, no members of the particular ethnic body would vote for the Republican ticket. The Republican managers involved failed to consider that every analysis of this ethnic groups voting showed it to be largely hard Democratic loyalists.

Statistical Approaches:

These approaches use either demographic or behavioral segmentation methods. In operation the demographic or behavioral data is divided along geographic lines to form a geo-demographic or geo-behavioral analysis.

The typical geo-demographic approach is to attempt apply some form of multi-variate statistical technique to determine the performance of a previous candidate "most like" the current one among various demographic groups. The demographic data comes from the most recent census. The election data is drawn from public records. An alternate approach is to attempt to draw a relationship between the responses provided to a survey with the demographic makeup of the respondents.

A critical weakness of either approach is the assumption

demographic factors can be used as independent variables to predict partisian political behavior. As Bannon points out, there has been a marked decline in demographic bloc voting in the United States. A single demographic factor only provides a loose prediction of political behavior leading to the development of non-parsimonious models.

An additional weakness in the survey-demographic models is the reliance on small numbers of very small samples to build the model. Atlas notes that we arrive at complex multi-variate models using small numbers of small samples.

We have to question the entire approach because we are trying to predict a dependent variable (behavior) that is driectly measureable. This leads to the geo-behavioral approaches.

In the geo-behavioral approach, data from a previous election(s) is analyzed at the level of the precinct (roughly 500 voters) and decomposed to estimate the size of the behavioral groupings within the precinct. The poorest performer of each party is used to determine the number of hard loyalists of each party that vote in the precinct. A weak vs weak or strong vs strong candidate pairing is then used to estimate the total number of loyalists (hard + soft) of each party and the number of switchers. The data are readily available and

usually current within two years.

The weakness of the approach is that it relies on the proper mix of candidate pairings to be available for analysis. The estimation of hard loyalists requires a weak candidate of one party and a strong candidate of the other party be paired in a contest. Thus to estimate the hard loyalists of each party we need two such pairings: one weak vs strong and the other strong vs weak. Also, proper estimation of the soft loyalist segment and switcher segment additionally requires a weak vs weak pairing. Such convenient pairings are frequently not available.

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